

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: ELMER JENKINS, retired savings and loan officer

Elmer C. Jenkins, Welsh-English, was born in Salt Lake City, Utah, October 6, 1898. He was on his way to New Zealand on a Mormon Mission in 1917 and was detained in Hawaii because of World War I. He spent time on the islands of Hawaii, Maui--where he learned to speak Hawaiian--and Kauai. While on Oahu, in Kakaako, he told families about the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Upon completion of his mission, he returned to the Mainland, where he was married in 1923. The Jenkins later returned to Hawaii; Mr. Jenkins worked for American Savings and Loan. After Mr. Jenkins' retirement, the family moved to Utah, where they currently reside.

TIME LINE

1898	birth: Salt Lake City, Utah
1917	came to Hawaii on Mormon Mission
1919	attended dedication ceremonies of Mormon temple at Laie
1920	returned to Utah
1923	married
1941	returned to Hawaii to work for American Savings and Loan
1965	retired from American Savings and Loan
1965	moved to Utah

Tape No. 3-36-1-78
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Elmer Jenkins (EJ)

February 6, 1978

Kahala Hilton Hotel

BY: Gael Gouveia (GG)

GG: This is an interview with Mr. Elmer Jenkins on February 6, 1978, at Kahala Hilton Hotel. The interviewer is Gael Gouveia. Okay, now you came from Salt Lake on a Mormon Mission in 1917. Is that right?

EJ: That is correct.

GG: Okay, now, can you tell me a little bit about that, such as impressions when you first arrived and where you were sent?

EJ: Well, I came directly to Honolulu here on a ship that was bound for New Zealand. It stopped off here because it was the near the war (World War I) period. I was then directed to stay here.

GG: Do you recall the name of the ship?

EJ: It was the Niagara of the Canadian-Australian Royal Mail Line from Vancouver.

GG: And, what was your first impression when you...

EJ: Well, I will admit that it was one of almost like paradise, the word I'd been given to describe the Islands. I thoroughly enjoyed meeting, particularly, the Hawaiian people because that was the objective we had here being sent to speak and tell them about the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

GG: Had you expected to go on to New Zealand?

EJ: Yes. That was my call. But, when I got here, I was directed by the authorities of the church to stay here. There were eight of us and we stayed on.

GG: And where did the ship land?

EJ: In the Honolulu Harbor.

GG: Was the Aloha Tower there, then, or do you recall?

EJ: I don't recall that. The Tower, I believe came later.

GG: When you got off the ship, what did you do first?

EJ: We were met by the other missionaries who lived here, and were taken up to what would be known as the Mission Home which was up in the Auwaiolimu section [in Pauoa]. The Home no longer exists. There was also a chapel right along side of the mission. High-rise apartments are there in that district known as Punchbowl now.

GG: Now I understand that there was--and I'm not familiar with the terms, so correct me when I use the wrong ones as far as your church is concerned --but, was there a chapel or a branch in the Kakaako district?

EJ: I understand there was. My recollection was that there was also a chapel there. A small chapel. Local men were in charge. One of the early recollections was of a man by the name of Albert Like [A. Like was presiding elder of Kakaako Ward 1945-1949]. He later did a considerable amount of church work although he was school teacher by profession.

GG: Do you recall where the chapel was in Kakaako?

EJ: No.

GG: Now did you get down to that chapel yourself as part of your mission?

EJ: Not as an assignment. No. But I was of the impression that there was an assigned group of missionaries. And we go out two-by-two and usually there would be at least two that would be assigned to that part of the city.

GG: I see. Well, what connection did you have with Mr. Like, then? I have already talked to him.

EJ: Oh, have you? (We attended meetings together.)

GG: And I understand he was in the Kakaako chapel.

EJ: And he was also called a "branch president" that would be the one presiding over that area. Well, now that would be as far as I can remember. The man that I knew here was Ernest L. Miner; he was in charge of the whole Honolulu area. And then, over us all, was a man by the name of Samuel E. Wolley. And, he was the president of the mission. He lived at Laie, Oahu. (Later, Wesley Smith succeeded him.)

GG: I see. Was the temple built at Laie at that time?

EJ: No. But I stayed on and in 1919, the temple [at Laie] was completed and I attended the dedicatory services (still later the tabernacle on Beretania Street was built 1941). At that time (1919), I learned that

the son of Samuel E. Woolley, who was Ralph E. Woolley, was the contractor who constructed the temple and he also built the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. About 51 years ago.

GG: Right, 1927.

EJ: I think that was it.

GG: It [the Royal Hawaiian] was built. Well, then, now, do you recall when the Mormon temple must've been started before 1919?

EJ: Yes, I think it was several years in building, and was completed in 1919. And my recollection was it was dedicated and completed in about November of that year, 1919. And the president of the church came down and dedicated the temple.

GG: How did you get out there?

EJ: You mean, in transportation?

GG: Right.

EJ: It was by automobile.

GG: How were the roads?

EJ: Winding and the time was very slow.

GG: Did you go over the [Nuuanu] Pali and out?

EJ: Yes, we went out by way of the Pali.

GG: It's quite a trip, a journey.

EJ: Yes, it took a long time. We stayed in Laie, though, for about a month while we were out there. And at that time, we were assigned to stay and do some work in the temple itself.

GG: I see. Now coming back over to Honolulu, could you describe your day's activities as a missionary? What did you do?

EJ: Well, we were assigned almost every day to visit people and particularly those who might have shown an interest in the church. Some of the time, we would go into a section of the city and go door-to-door and visit with people and in that way, receive invitations to tell them about the story of the church and the gospel.

GG: And how did you select which neighborhoods to go into?

EJ: Well, normally there was a person who was in charge and he would direct the group that were assigned to that area, and would tell us. Normally, even the streets to visit.

GG: Now did you visit all nationalities?

EJ: Yes. We did when we were doing that. But our main stress at that time at least was with the Hawaiian people. We did not discriminate as far as talking to people. We were given to understand that our special assignment would be the Hawaiian people or those of Hawaiian blood and extraction.

GG: Was there a particular reason for that?

EJ: No reason at all other than we were instructed to learn the language. When we were in the rural districts, to reach the older people particularly, we had to know the language. So that was the reason for the stress on that point. However, we talked often to the older people who were of other ethnic groups. And there was no discrimination.

GG: Do you remember at all the kinds of things that you would talk with them about?

EJ: Well, normally, we liked to get to know them and ask them about the background of their families and some of their desires. Then we would usually ask them what we call "the golden question." "Have you heard about the Mormon church?" And if they said, "Yes." "Well, would you like to know more?" And then if they said, "yes," that gave us an opportunity to go in and start telling them about what we believed.

GG: And what if they said no?

EJ: If they said no, we said, "Well, we're still friends and we're happy if we may visit you again and become better acquainted. Why, we'd like to. And if you do not wish to know about the church, why, we understand, too."

GG: Can you tell me again, now, how you learned the language?

EJ: Well, my first contact was with an older Hawaiian couple that I, personally, was introduced to. And, I can't even remember the family name, but, it was in Waipahu on Maui. And, I was left there for a week and had a chance to talk to them only in their language because they would not talk to me in English. And I learned several hundred domestic words as well as a few religious words.

(Laughter)

GG: Did you find it difficult?

EJ: No. There're only 12 letters in the alphabet, as you know, in the language. And, it was so--shall we say--musical, that it was a delight to speak it and to attempt to talk. And we did talk almost completely after we'd been there a few months to people who wished to talk in the language, with them. Now, the church, of course, does have a program

where they'd go to a special school and are taught for three months the language of the country to which they are assigned.

GG: I see. Do you recall at all how a conversation may have gone, say around meal time? How did you manage?

EJ: (Laughs) Well, you mean in this first conversation?

GG: Yes, yes.

EJ: Well, there was considerable pointing because we had to do it by hand and I would turn to either the lady of the house or to the man and point to something. And in that way I would get a word back. Evidently, they had been in touch with other missionaries and had used this method of getting a quick grasp of the words that were used, particularly around the house.

GG: Did they know how to speak English, though?

EJ: I don't know. I didn't hear one English word.

(Laughter)

GG: Were they church people?

EJ: They belonged to the church? Yes.

GG: And then, now, that was in Maui. How long were you there?

EJ: About six months.

GG: And then, from there did you come back?

EJ: Came back here and spent about 19 months here (in Honolulu). And the final year, I spent on Kauai.

GG: Do you remember, now, what areas in Honolulu that you covered?

EJ: Yes, almost all of them, including Kakaako.

GG: Do you recall actually visiting people in Kakaako?

EJ: I don't recall the names, but, yes. I was assigned on occasion to go into Kakaako and visit with the people down there.

GG: And can you tell me any more about that?

EJ: Well, my recollection after half a century is a little vague on specifics. But I do recall the people being very congenial and hospitable. And in that friendly atmosphere you naturally respond, and that was a feeling of elation.

GG: Can you tell me about going into their homes or, I guess, amplify what you mean by their hospitality.

EJ: Well, we would ordinarily--because of the Hawaiian hospitality--we were invited to eat in their homes on occasion. And that was one of the pleasant experiences. Of course, we enjoyed the poi and the laulau and the lomilomi salmon and all the other delicacies. But it was basic food, normally, of what I can recall at that time.

GG: And do you recall at all what the attitudes of the Hawaiian people was? Of course, I'm sure church entered into the picture a little bit. But to a degree, you're still an outsider as a Caucasian. Do you recall any feelings about attitudes in that area?

EJ: I never recall any Hawaiian or one of Hawaiian extraction showing anything but a friendly attitude and becoming very verbal in explaining and enjoying the conversation.

GG: When you approached people now, was it quite often the women that you talked to or the men or both?

EJ: Well, I'd say there would be more women than men due to the time of day. And at times when men were at work. However, we tried where possible to just have a short conversation, and then ask if it was possible to come back when the man of the house was there so we can talk to them together, or as a family.

GG: Do you remember--I'm sure you must have observed these women to a degree--what kinds of activities were they engaged in when you would come to the house?

EJ: Well, all the way from lei-sellers, and there were quite a few of them at that time, to people that were working in offices. And, I don't believe the great number of women were working for gain or for remuneration at that time like there are now. I understand about 80 percent in Hawaii of the women-folk are now engaged in working for a livelihood.

GG: Out of the numbers that you talked to, approximately how many would become involved in the church, or can you guess?

EJ: Well, I'd say, we at that time, would have at least half of the people that we talked to showed an interest in what we were giving by way of information. And although they didn't necessarily accept the church at the time, there were quite a few. I wouldn't be able to give you fully a percentage but, we were fairly successful in convincing them to be Christian at least.

GG: Right. Were many of these people of other religions at the time?

EJ: Yes. The great number that we met were of the Calvinistic (and Protestant) following and we felt that part of that seemed to be in the joy and pleasure they got in singing the songs relative to church. And it was a delight to hear them sing. We encouraged them in singing the church songs.

GG: Now did the Calvinist church, did they have singing too?

EJ: Yes, that's what I meant.

GG: I guess what I'm trying to get at is if they were involved to get any great degree in one church. Can you account for motivation, perhaps the change in churches at all? Or had they, more or less, perhaps, become inactive?

EJ: Sometimes that would happen. And, at times, of course, we had quite a sizeable following. The church did before I came here. And, as a result, that nucleus in each of these groupings where the chapels were was sufficient to man or to staff the groups or the congregation. And then, our efforts would be to help in bringing new people in the church.

GG: And, did you find, I guess, you know, kind of word of mouth or did you talk to maybe the Kalua's friends because Mr. Kalua suggested that...

EJ: References were given, yes. But, in this house-to-house or door-to-door contact, we would learn of course, that there were friends in the church, too. And that continues to this day. We do have that kind of proselytizing.

GG: And can you recall or do you have recollections of perhaps walking in the Kakaako area? Do you remember physically, what it looked like?

EJ: Yes, I can recall that the homes were more modest and there were parts of the Kakaako area that had small stores. And the commercial part of the area was a little greater, I think, than even the residential.

GG: And, do you recall an area called Squattersville at all?

EJ: No.

GG: That was from what I understand, by the waterfront and houses were sort of pieced together and that many Hawaiians lived in that area.

EJ: I can recall some of the, shall we say, shouldn't use the word, "shacks" that had been there. But I wasn't aware of very many people living in the ones that were not modernized. Up to date.

GG: Now, I understand the area that was known as Magoon Block. Does that ring a bell?

EJ: Yes.

GG: Do you recall?

EJ: I do recall that.

GG: Or can you describe that a little more?

EJ: Yes. We were very conscientious in seeing everyone in that whole block. I can recall that. In fact, I might say that one of our friends here is Genevieve Magoon.

GG: Oh, yes. I have interviewed her, too.

(Laughter)

GG: Because, of course, they were big landowners in that area.

EJ: Still are.

GG: Right.

EJ: Yes. We were with her Sunday morning. No, not this Sunday, but the Sunday before. She's "Mrs. Republican" here now.

GG: (Laughs) Can you recall anything about interactions between people? Now, in a church situation, what kinds of activities did you have for them and how did they participate?

EJ: Well, our program covered almost all phases of life starting with a kindergarten group and children. And then, youth group, which we still have a very strong program, with an athletic program that included basketball. We also in the older groups do socialize well, because we feel the basic philosophy of our church is built on the family itself. And so, that's the stress that we made and do make now.

GG: Now, was the congregation, then, primarily Hawaiian, you said?

EJ: Yes, I'd say that the majority would be at that time. That's right.

GG: And I understand, now, in Kakaako, there were a few Portuguese families that belonged to the branch there.

EJ: And I guess there still are quite a few of people of Portuguese extraction that are members of the church.

GG: Do you recall at all whether you had Japanese or Filipino in, say, the Kakaako area?

EJ: I don't recall that. I do recall knowing a number of members of the church of both those ethnic groups.

GG: And do you recall how, now, if it was predominantly Hawaiian, the interaction, say between the Hawaiians and the other ethnic groups since they were so small. Were they accepted or received graciously into the...

EJ: From all I knew, yes. Yes, I felt that there was simple faith that brought them so that they looked on each other as a brother and that was a feature of intermingling. That's to me, part of Hawaii. The word "aloha" was really stressed and enjoyed.

GG: At that time...

EJ: Yes.

GG: Were you involved in the sports programs at all?

EJ: No. Not personally.

GG: Okay, and also may I ask, were you paid a salary at that time or how did you...

EJ: No, I received no salary or material compensation. All missionaries were of the type that we were, were not (paid any compensation). Our folks were the ones (who paid for our expenses), although we earned some of the funds ourselves, to bring us here and keep us here. I mentioned to you over the phone that the last year when I was here on Kauai that I went without purse or script even though my folks sent me \$30 a month, and that was a lot of money then. And, I saved most of it. But, they [the people of Kauai] were so hospitable that we were offered food and as we went from place to place, they were so generous that we had no difficulty. That was our only compensation plus the satisfaction of doing something we felt was helpful.

GG: What did you do about lodging?

EJ: We stayed right with the people. In their homes. Usually there was a spot (where we could rest). And we traveled by twos. There were two of us. We'd sometimes walk 20 miles before we finally found the place that was offered to us. We'd never ask. It was usually offered. And if it wasn't offered, we didn't attempt to stress it. On one or two occasions we had rather a slim amount of food, and occasionally didn't have too of an ideal place to stay, but...

GG: (Laughs) Do you recall any anecdotes or especially fond memories?

EJ: Well....(Laughs) I know that one of the pleasant things toward the last was Judge C.B. Hofgaard on Waimea, Kauai; he (owned a large general store and) was one of the men that let us, instead of walk distances between towns, permitted us to get on one of the delivery wagons. So later, when he came to the Mainland and came to Salt Lake (I was then married) we entertained him in our home. Any time any of the Hawaiians came to Salt Lake we always

tried to at least show that hospitality that had been given to me when I was a young missionary.

GG: Over the years, have many that you, perhaps, had mission contact with here in Hawaii gone through Salt Lake?

EJ: They have been quite a few. Yes, quite a few. And more through the business (American Savings and Loan in Hawaii) contact that I've had. I give you the best illustration in one--I had four girls that are of Japanese extraction that were secretaries. One of them moved back to Salt Lake and married back there. She married a bank examiner. And now she's back here, by the way. She did enjoy being in Salt Lake, belonging to the church. The other three are not members of the church. They're still with the company (American Savings and Loan). They've all worked for over 30 years, all of them. Floyd Scott (senior vice-president) has been 34 years with the company.

GG: Now when you completed your mission you went back to Salt Lake and finished college? How did you end up coming back to Hawaii with American Savings and Loan?

EJ: (Laughs) I was asked by the top officers at that time. Was a member of the Board of Directors. I was asked to come back and become the manager. That was a real highlight in my life. They did go to my wife and get her consent also.

(Laughter)

GG: Did you have any objections?

Wife: Oh yes. Because I didn't know anyone here when we came.

EJ: She was apprehensive but it worked out so well. We had teenagers at that time. One of them went to Punahou, the daughter (Mary Lou). And even though she went to Punahou, she still talks about school and friends much more than she did when she graduated from Stanford. So, it shows a zest for being in Hawaii.

GG: Right. What year then, did you come back to the islands?

EJ: August, 1941.

GG: You were here then, when Pearl Harbor...

EJ: I was here (for the Day of Infamy at) Pearl Harbor. Mrs. Jenkins was back there [Salt Lake City] planning to come and I called that morning to talk to her to arrange to come. And the operator on the telephone said, "My, don't you know that we're being bombed?" So I went outside and saw the billows of smoke in the distance---were you here then?

GG: No. Whereabouts were you staying?

EJ: Out in Waikiki. When I went out and looked in that direction you could see all the fireworks.

Also, I had the privilege of being here when Hawaii became a state.

GG: I was here then.

EJ: Were you? And then, the dedication. I attended the dedication of the State Capitol here (Honolulu) which was a feature I felt was wonderful.

GG: And then, you were here through the (Second World) war years, too?

EJ: Yes.

GG: I see. (To wife) And did you join him or you stayed...

Wife: (Mildred Jenkins) We were not permitted to come.

GG: Right. That's what I thought.

EJ: I went back, though, on a troop ship later. Took us 11 days, and got there too late for Christmas.

GG: Oh, dear. (Laughs)

EJ: So they ground out that "White Christmas" from Irving Berlin's on the gramophone.

(Laughter)

GG: Bing Crosby?

EJ: Bing Crosby was singing. As a result, that has become, since he died, an even more sentimental piece.

GG: How did the war, perhaps affect the work that you were doing?

EJ: Well, quite a bit. We were curtailed and that was the reason I stayed on for almost a year longer.

GG: This is the church work?

EJ: Church work. We were curbed, of course, with our company not growing as much as it should.

GG: And then, now, did it affect church activities too?

EJ: Yes.

GG: In what kind of ways?

EJ: I think, that they didn't send missionaries here at that time. Young men were enlisting in the services. We believe in defending our country. When I went back to the university I was in the ROTC (Reserve Officer's Training Corps) at the university there.

GG: Are there any other incidents that you recall that you'd like to relate, either church work or business work--say, your contacts with people?

EJ: Well, I can say this to you very frankly, that I have learned being in the Islands, the color of the skin of people isn't important. There is great friendliness in Hawaii. The business that I'm in, those of Oriental extraction, were and are predominant. And I have a healthy regard for their honesty and integrity. We have a few representatives of the other races that are in the organization. I went to church Sunday before last, and met quite a few of the people that I had known when we lived here. There are more Caucasians now. There were many of Oriental extraction, too. (Andy Komatsu, Glenn Lung and Albert Ho are some who hold high church position.)

GG: Would you say, then, the church today, even here in Hawaii, has a predominantly Caucasian membership?

EJ: Well, no. All racial extraction seem well-represented. There is a greater number of Caucasians than there have been in the years past. Possibly because of the influx more of coming from the Mainland.

GG: And that's one particular ward you're speaking of?

EJ: Yes, the Kahala ward.

GG: Oh, I see.

EJ: Right close. We lived on Aukai Street in Kahala. In fact, I might say in pride that our son, Edward, who also lived here, came back after he graduated from college, became a bishop of the Kahala Ward. And our daughter, Mary Lou, incidently, is what we call a "Relief Society president," which is one of the high positions of the women in the church. She lives in Provo, Utah now. Her husband D.W. Thurston is on the executive staff of the Brigham Young University.

GG: And where is your son?

EJ: He's up in Idaho now. And is a rancher and a real estate man. (Laughs)

GG: When did you leave Hawaii to go back to Utah?

EJ: In 1967, I retired in 1965. It was nearly two years later, drawn by the family being there.

GG: I see. Your children had already moved?

EJ: They'd moved. Our daughter was in London at the time. Her husband originally was a naval man. Had his training at Annapolis. And served 20 years for the navy before retiring. And then, he went into the academic field.

GG: I see. But, you still get back and forth quite frequently...

EJ: Yearly. We've done it yearly because of this contact with the American Savings and Loan Association. And, I'm still a member of the Board of Directors.

GG: Okay, well, I think that's all we need to do for today.

END OF INTERVIEW

REMEMBERING KAKA'AKO: 1910-1950

Volume I

**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

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